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AFGHANISTAN

SNAPSHOT

Businesswomen Are Ready For 2014

From cottage industry to big business, Afghanistan's women entrepreneurs say they are ready to stand on their own.



Sima Tabib and Malika Qaneh

Photo Credit: USAID/TAFA

The entrepreneurs express enthusiasm and optimism but say that they need a formal association to speak for them and represent their interests

"We are ready for the future! Maw tars nadaraim (*We are not afraid*)" declared Sima Tabib, head of Aziz National Furniture and one of Afghanistan's most respected business leaders.

Mrs Tabib's feisty assertion was echoed by five other women entrepreneurs when they met Anwar ul Haq Ahadi, minister of commerce in mid-October. The minister had called the meeting to ask Afghanistan's small but significant women business community for its perspective on the imminent withdrawal of NATO forces.

Though the women expressed some concern about the post-2014 security situation, they insisted that they were optimistic overall. Malika Qaneh, president of SunPharma, Afghanistan's first pharmaceutical company owned by a woman, said: "What could be worse than the Taliban era? I have lived through the war and have seen it all. I have established my own business six years ago. People will always need medicines and my company will be here for many years beyond 2014. We will thrive."

Her optimism was shared by Soraya Saifi, president of Sha Saifi Corporation and Roya Maboob, founder and CEO of Afghan Citadel Software Company.

Bakht Nazir Niazi, who exports fine Afghan jewelry to the US and Europe, said that USAID and the Commerce Ministry were instrumental in getting her started in 2003, but "I believe businesswomen in Afghanistan can now stand on their own."

She added that, "However, we do need more support especially in organizing a women's business group that can speak strongly for us and represent our interests before the government and the international community."

Kamela Sediqi, president of Kaweyan Business Consulting, agreed that Afghanistan's businesswomen "need the structure to be put in place now. There is no formal group at the moment that looks after the interests of businesswomen."

The six were part of the 13-strong group of women entrepreneurs identified by USAID to attend the Delhi Investment Summit in June 2012. The group has since become an informal sounding board on important issues relating to business and investment in Afghanistan.